

## REGION II REGIONAL MENTAL HEALTH BOARD, INC.

Good Afternoon, Senator Harp and Rep. Candelaria and distinguished members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Kristie Barber and I am the Executive Director of the Region II Regional Mental Health Board. We have volunteer run committees made up of your constituents that represent 39 towns in the south central region. We are a monitoring body for the agencies that serve DMHAS funded clients aka consumers.

I applaud the budget proposed by Governor Malloy and his team that avoids major service reductions to DMHAS and the mental health service system. Community Based services are important to recovery of the consumers of mental health services.

There is an increase of monies for permanent supportive housing to create 150 new supportive units. When you listen to consumers supportive housing is one of the single most important components of recovery. If you think about a young person starting out on their own and what supports they need when they get their first apartment, perhaps money assistance, food prep help, budgeting, etc. and all the mishaps that go along with that. When you look at supportive housing for people with mental illness, it is much different; there are some units that are shared living space, some in individual apartments.

I was most struck when I heard a story from a consumer that was living in her car for a long time and not able to get an apartment because of her depression. Once she got a supportive housing situation, she needed help to keep herself from sleeping in her car rather than sleeping in a bed. It was anxiety provoking to sleep in the bed. She is now working, living on her own and going to school. I know that is a striking example but it is telling.

I have been in this position for a little over a year. I say that I still have "Fresh" eyes and they see differently than others. I have witnessed a dedication and determination and frankly love for people with mental illness from the employees, professionals, and natural supporters of people in recovery from mental illness. If you have been affected by mental illness in your family, or friends, you know how tricky it can be to get someone treatment and keep them stabilized once they are stable in their process. If you visit an agency and I invite you to do so, you would see how important this work is and how many employees have gone without any raise in pay for 3-4 years or are working additional hours and taken on additional responsibilities because there is a hiring freeze still in place for years. It is impressive.

Therefore, I praise Governor Malloy and his colleagues including you for having the vision to be supportive of mental health and addition services in this budget period. You will hear many voices in the community opposing the taxes etc that have been proposed. Hopefully our voices will hold in your minds stronger and more impactful than theirs.

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